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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000873

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SUBJECT: 2004 CENSUS RESULTS: FIVE MILLION MISSING YEMENIS?

REF: SANAA 589

Classified By: CDA Nabeel Khoury for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary and Comment. On March 16, the Yemen Central Statistics Organization (CSO) surprised the donor community in Sanaa, along with many ROYG officials, by announcing a 2004 Census result of 19.7 million Yemenis, an apparent drop from an estimated 22 million. Earlier that day, two senior ROYG officials confided to Ambassador that they expected the new census would reveal a current population of 25 million. The discrepancy of 5.3 million between official estimates and the new official figure has been met so far with widespread skepticism. ROYG underreporting of population figures, if true, may reflect an attempt to artificially improve economic indicators such as per capita GDP; this would run counter, however, to what has been considered traditional over reporting in order to garner greater donor aid. Others claim the ROYG is underreporting population figures in opposition Islah strongholds in order to influence redistricting plans in advance of September 2006 local council and presidential elections. Among these many claims of wrongdoing, none alone are likely to account for a miscounting in the millions. Post recommends caution, however, in coming to any conclusions based on the preliminary figures until the final results are out and further study of both methods and motives is conducted. End Summary and Comment.

12. (U) Background: ROYG official estimates just prior to the new Census pointed to a population of 21.7 million. The round figure of 22 million has used by the ROYG and the international community based on the 1994 Census of 14.6 million and an estimated annual growth rate of 3.5 percent. The new December 2004 Yemen Census was funded in part by a 1 million USD grant from USAID. The preliminary results announced on March 16 cover only a few key indicators such as population growth rate and size. According to CSO Chairman Amin al-Din, the complete 2004 Census figures will be released in four months. End Background.

13. (C) Just hours before the March 16 announcement, two high ranking ROYG Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) officials, Jalal Yagoub and Nabil Shaiban, projected to Ambassador a new population figure of 25 million. When the official 2004 Census results were released later that day, however, the ROYG gave the number of 19.7 million. The CSO also claimed a decrease in the growth rate from 3.7 in 1994 to 3.02 in 2004. CSO Director al-Din, told USAID Director several days after the Census, release that he had resisted pressure from President Saleh himself to inflate the figures. (Comment: This may be bravado as it is hard to believe any ROYG official would disobey a direct request from the President. End Comment.)

WHERE ARE THE 5.3 MILLION HIDING, AND WHY?

14. (C) In explaining lower than expected 2004 Census results, many observers point to inaccuracies in the 1994 Census data. That Census was taken just after a civil war and amidst internal instability that could have contributed to a less than accurate count. Other insiders insist that the ROYG has traditionally over estimated its population's size for the purpose of eliciting increased international development aid contributions, holding that the current 19.7 figure is likely a more realistic number.

15. (C) There are also credible claims of underreporting of district populations where the opposition Islah has a stronghold, as well as of underreporting of women and children. International Federation for Election System (IFES) officials in Sanaa suspect there was underreporting in the 2004 Census. They hold that the GPC tried and succeeded in gerrymandering to increase its seats in Parliament by redistricting areas of opposition strength before the last elections in 2003. Deputy Foreign Minister Noman also suspects politics influenced some of the new figures, calling the reported increase in the population of GPC dominated Taiz from 2.4 to 3.6 million "not plausible."

16. (C) Majid al-Fahd, of the Civil Democratic Forum (CDF), also believes that the Census results are biased in order to skew future election redistricting in favor of the ruling GPC. The CSO conducted the survey not through random selection by employing 30,000 officials tasked with visiting

every household in Yemen. According to Fahd, CDF was the only organization systematically monitoring the census and found that of 6900 households it polled throughout the country, 21 percent reported never being visited by a census representative. Noman joked that he discovered in a Qat session attended by 15 others, he was the only one in the room who had been visited by a census taker. Fahd also charged CSO officials with neglecting to visit every household, suggesting they relied on tribal sheikhs for a count of residents in their region. Many of these same men serve on local councils or are members of Parliament, leading Fahd to believe the number of 19.7 is not too low, but possibly too high, as a result of these Sheikhs' attempts to inflate their constituencies.

17. (C) Comment: The controversy on actual, as opposed to politically motivated figures, will likely persist partially due to the novelty of reliance on objective statistics in Yemen. This controversy, we hope, will only spur local and international organizations to conduct more research that should eventually lend to more reliable figures. End Comment.
Khoury